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INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7291

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 7663

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 3014

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5702

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6769

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3481

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4953

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2529

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3814

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: CLIMATE CHANGE COULD SEVERELY IMPACT NEPAL

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11. (SBU) Summary: Due to its geographic location in the Himalayas, Nepal is likely to be substantially impacted by climate change. During a meeting with leading environmental non-governmental organizations, private citizens, and the Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, PDAS Moon urged Nepal to associate itself with the Copenhagen Accords. The Minister and NGO leaders asked the United States to help address the fundamental challenges that will result from a changing climate. End Summary.

Copenhagen to Kathmandu

12. (SBU) During the Copenhagen climate change conference, Nepal organized peaceful demonstrations to highlight climate change impacts on the mountains and people of Nepal. These events (the highlight of which was a peaceful march) were well attended by the international mountaineering community and drew modest international media attention. Despite these and other efforts, Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation Deepak Bohra complained that mountain nations failed to receive sufficient mention in the main events at Copenhagen.

13. (SBU) According to Minister Bohra, Nepal is trying to use its leadership of the group of 49 Least Developed Countries to elevate the importance of Nepal in climate change negotiations. Nepal's Prime Minister is trying to establish a network of "mountain countries" for future climate change negotiations. Minister Bohra said the network could include Himalayan, Andean, Alpine, and other mountainous nations. (Note: Climate change will likely impact the Himalayan watershed in radically different ways, compared to other mountain ranges' watersheds, such as the Rocky Mountains. End Note.)

14. (SBU) Despite the lack of focus on mountain nations, Copenhagen represents significant progress towards addressing climate change, according to Minister Bohra. Dr. Andreas Schild, director of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) - a regional research and development organization - emphasized the urgency and importance of addressing climate change and Nepal signing onto COP 15. This view was reiterated and reinforced by World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Nepali climate change expert,

Ugan Mandandhar. PDAS Moon added that the USG has actively encouraged Nepal to sign onto COP 15, and emphasized the importance of world consensus to address climate change.

Climate Change and Nepal

15. (SBU) Several participants informed PDAS Moon that Nepal, and the region, is likely to suffer from climate changes. Changing weather and rainfall patterns will severely disrupt traditional farming practices, on which 66 percent of Nepalese depend. Higher temperatures and lower precipitation levels will decrease the ability of high-elevation reservoirs of water (glaciers and snow fields) to provide consistent water to the more than one billion people living downstream. Impacts of climate change on high altitude environments are still largely unknown and awareness of these issues is lacking, something organizations like ICIMOD and WWF in Nepal are trying to change.

16. (SBU) Minister Bohra reported that on December 4, 2009 the Prime Minister held a well-publicized cabinet meeting on Mount Everest to highlight these threats. Minister Bohra participated and stated the importance of drawing international attention to the impacts of climate change on Nepal. ICIMOD and WWF representatives expressed optimism that increased levels of international assistance for climate change activities in Nepal could help mitigate the impending threats. These experts see both adaptation and mitigation efforts as critical in Nepal, and have already started to undertake pilot activities in these areas.

Glacial Lakes

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17. (SBU) Increased glacial melt results in the formation of glacial lakes, which threaten to burst and cause widespread devastation. Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), as they are called, have the potential to be extremely dangerous in Nepal, according to Dawa Sherpa, a mountaineer and climate change ambassador for Nepal. Dr. Schild confirmed the threat, and noted that there is a lack of research and information about effective technical solutions to prevent GLOFs in the Himalayas. There are over 200 glacial lakes in the Hindu Kush area, many of which pose a significant threat to Nepal. Dawa Sherpa asked the United States and the international community to assist Nepal find and implement an appropriate solution to prevent GLOFs.

Regional Issues

18. (SBU) Nepal is in a unique regional position, according to Minister Bohra and the NGO groups. While Nepal's carbon emissions are minimal, neighbors India and China are substantial polluters. Water originating in Nepal accounts for 45 percent of the annual flow of the Ganges River alone, and provides water to over a billion people throughout Asia, according to recent estimates. Nepal is keenly aware of the importance of India and China in addressing climate change. Minister Bohra outlined a proposed government strategy to create regional dialogue to foster and coordinate regional solutions to climate change issues. Minister Bohra made it clear that regional and international efforts are both a priority and a necessity to address climate change in Nepal, and said he looked forward to Nepal taking more of a leadership role both regionally and amongst mountain countries in upcoming international events.

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